

**FIRST INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP
ON THE LANGUAGES OF VANUATU**

Australian National University, Canberra
Kioloa campus

21-23 October 2011

This is the first announcement for a workshop we are convening on the languages of Vanuatu, in October 2011.

1 THE LANGUAGES OF VANUATU

With about 106 vernacular languages for 234,000 inhabitants, the Republic of Vanuatu hosts the world's highest linguistic density *per capita* (Crowley 2000). All these languages belong to the Oceanic branch of the Austronesian family. Except for three Polynesian outliers, the country's vernacular languages have been tentatively assigned a common ancestor below Oceanic, namely *Proto Southern Oceanic* (Lynch 2000). In other terms, the linguistic density observed today, rather than resulting from any deep-level genetic diversity, reflects three millennia of *in situ* language diversification from a common ancestor. The result today is a mosaic of languages showing both a strong unity in parts of their systems, and a rather impressive diversity in many other respects. Finally, the modern era has also seen the emergence of the pidgin/creole Bislama, today the national language of Vanuatu, with an identity of its own.

Since the lexical surveys by Tryon (1976), the last three decades have seen a steady increase in the number and quality of studies dedicated to the languages of the Vanuatu archipelago. Areas which used to be poorly known have been the object of descriptive endeavours, both by distinguished scholars and by a younger generation of doctoral and post-doctoral students. While the number of linguists working on Vanuatu is still lower than the number of its languages, it has become significant enough to justify a meeting of its own, with the hope to strengthen the ties between scholars of various horizons and generations.

2 THE WORKSHOP

The department of [Linguistics](#) at the Australian National University (*School of Culture, History and Language*) proposes to convene a workshop of linguists working on the languages of Vanuatu, during three days 21-23 October 2011.

Our guest speaker will be **Prof John Lynch**, from the University of the South Pacific.

The venue will be the ANU campus of [Kioloa, located](#) on the NSW coast; this is a drive of about 2h30 from Canberra, and 3h40 from Sydney. The campus enables accommodation for about 20-25 people.

Our limited budget will not allow us to help participants with transport or accommodation. This will be a self-funded event, i.e. costs for transport, accommodation and petrol will have to be paid by the participants. However, based on experience, these costs should be reasonably low (e.g., accommodation in Kioloa costs 30 AUD /person /night in a shared bedroom). Food will be provided on a self catering basis.

Transport options from Canberra to Kioloa will be proposed to participants coming from the capital. Overseas participants flying through Sydney may want to share costs by arranging transport directly from there; we can facilitate the organisation of these aspects. The plan is to get to Kioloa on the Friday (21 Oct) noon, and leave on the Sunday afternoon, so as to get back to Canberra in the evening. Depending on the number of participants, we hope to have a flexible schedule, with time for papers and discussions, as well as relaxing moments, *wokbaot nomo long sanbij mo storian olbaot*.

3 CALL FOR PAPERS

Prospective participants are invited to propose papers of 30 minutes in length, related to any aspect of the languages spoken in Vanuatu. Though Vanuatu is the main focus, paper proposals dealing with languages of the Solomon Islands or New Caledonia will also be accepted, within the practical limits of available accommodation.

Topics may include any of the following:

- synchronic description of the phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics or pragmatics of particular Vanuatu languages
- issues in grammar writing or dictionary writing
- methodology of fieldwork
- aspects of language documentation
- historical reconstruction, comparative linguistics
- language contact; social aspects of language use
- areal features shared by several languages of the archipelago
- issues related to Bislama, whether in itself or in its relationship with vernacular languages
- issues of language endangerment and maintenance, vernacular education and language policy

- diffusion of our knowledge about Vanuatu languages, both to communities and to the broader public
- verbal art and oral literature

4 HOW TO PROCEED

People thinking of taking part in the workshop should write to the organisers (alexandre.francois@anu.edu.au) as early as possible, stating their interest. This will help us estimate the number of participants, and therefore proceed to appropriate bookings for accommodation. Please indicate if you are thinking of bringing any guests, and how many. When possible, a tentative topic for a talk would be useful.

Prospective participants will later be invited to send a final title, and short abstract (max 150 words), before Monday, March 21st. A reminder will be sent before that date, to appropriate lists.

We hope this workshop will be the opportunity for Vanuatu linguists to share their fieldwork experience and ideas, in a relaxed and stimulating environment.

For any question you may have, please feel free to contact the organisers:

- Alex François (alexandre.francois@anu.edu.au)
LACITO-CNRS; Visiting Fellow @ANU.
- Sébastien Lacrampe (sebastien.lacrampe@anu.edu.au),
PhD student @ANU.

Tankyu tumas,

Alex François
Sébastien Lacrampe